

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-8. (canceled)

9. **(new)** A ribbon marking device for recording markings consecutively on a ribbon, said device comprising:

a unwind spindle;

a rewind spindle;

a plurality of ribbon guides about which said ribbon is to be entrained, said ribbon guides being arranged between said unwind spindle and said rewind spindle to define a path along which said ribbon operatively moves from said unwind spindle to said rewind spindle;

a moving support moveable between a forward position and a rearward position, said moving support supporting thereon at least one of said ribbon guides; and

an elastic element attached to said moving support and biasing said moving support toward the rearward position; and

a marking head moveable toward and away from said path.

10. **(new)** The device of claim 9, wherein a length of said path is longer when said moving support is in the rearward position than when said moving support is in the forward position.

11. **(new)** The device of claim 9, further comprising a braking element for braking a supply spool of said ribbon being supported on said unwind spindle when said moving support is in a position other than the forward position, wherein said braking element is released by said moving support to allow supply of said ribbon when said moving support reaches the forward position.

12. **(new)** The device of claim 9, further comprising a motor coupled to drive said rewind spindle in two opposite directions to advance and return said ribbon, respectively.

13. **(new)** The device of claim 12, wherein said unwind spindle is passively driven by said ribbon.

14. **(new)** The device of claim 9, further comprising a frame supporting said spindles, ribbon guides and guides for said moving support, wherein said elastic element is a spring having one end attached to the moving support and another end attached to said frame.

15. **(new)** A ribbon marking system, comprising:
a supply spool of ribbon;
a take-up spool of said ribbon;
a plurality of ribbon guides about which said ribbon is entrained, said ribbon guides being arranged between said spools to define a path along which said ribbon operatively moves from said supply spool to said take-up spool;
a moving support moveable between a forward position and a rearward position, said moving support supporting thereon at least one of said ribbon guides; and
an elastic element attached to said moving support and biasing said moving support toward the rearward position; and
a marking head moveable toward and away from said ribbon.

16. **(new)** The system of claim 15, wherein a length of said ribbon on said path gradually decreases as said moving support moves from the rearward position to the forward position.

17. **(new)** The system of claim 15, further comprising a braking element that brakes said supply spool when said moving support is in a position other than the forward position, wherein said braking element is released by said moving support to allow supply of said ribbon from said supply spool when said moving support reaches the forward position.

18. **(new)** The system of claim 15, further comprising a motor coupled to drive said take-up spool in two opposite directions to advance and return said ribbon, respectively.

19. **(new)** The system of claim 18, wherein said supply spool is passively driven by said ribbon.

20. **(new)** The system of claim 15, further comprising a frame pivotally supporting said spools, wherein said ribbon guides and guides for said moving support are also supported by said frame, and said elastic element is a spring having one end attached to the moving support and another end attached to said frame.

21. **(new)** The system of claim 15, wherein said ribbon guides are idler rollers.

22. **(new)** The system of claim 15, wherein said moving support is driven by said ribbon toward the forward position when said ribbon is tractioned in an advance direction from the supply spool toward the take-up spool.

23. **(new)** The system of claim 15, wherein said ribbon is heat-sensitive ink ribbon.

24. **(new)** A method of recording markings on a ribbon without unused segments of said ribbons being left between the markings, said method comprising the steps of:

- a) lowering a marking head on said ribbon, which has been entrained about a plurality of ribbon guides to extend between a supply spool and a take-up spool, and recording a marking on said ribbon;
- b) raising said marking head away from said ribbon to a raised position;
- c) returning said ribbon in a direction from said take-up spool to said supply spool so that said marking head is located above the recorded marking;
- d) advancing said ribbon in an opposite direction from said supply spool to said take-up spool and lowering said marking head on said ribbon at a location immediately after the recorded marking to record another marking immediately after the recorded marking; and
- e) repeating steps b), c) and d) for a number of times without unreeling said ribbon from said supply spool.

25. **(new)** The method of claim 24, wherein in step c) said ribbon is returned a distance equivalent to a distance said ribbon is advanced in step d) during the time taken by the marking header to descend from the raised position to said ribbon.

26. **(new)** The method of claim 24, further comprising braking the supply spool during step e) until a predetermined length of said ribbon has been wound onto said take-up spool.

27. **(new)** The method of claim 26, wherein one of said ribbon guides is moveable relative to the other ribbon guides between first and second positions, and the predetermined length of said ribbon is defined by the first position of said moveable ribbon guide;

step e) comprising gradually moving the moveable ribbon guide, by repeating steps c) and d), against a tensioning force from the first position to the second position.

28. **(new)** The method of claim 27, further comprising
releasing the supply spool from the brake when the moveable ribbon guide reaches the second position; and

allowing the moveable ribbon guide to return from the second position to the first position under action of said tensioning force, thereby unreeling a subsequent predetermined length of said ribbon from said supply spool.